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Chair: Ms. Hayashi

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General discussion on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction and climate change

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

General discussion on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction and climate change

Welcoming remarks

1. **The Chair** said that, as the first step in the process of preparing a general recommendation on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction and climate change, the general discussion was an opportunity for the Committee to receive oral and written inputs that would support the drafting process. The Committee planned to begin drafting the general recommendation in the second half of 2016.

Opening remarks

2. **Mr. Salama** (Director of Human Rights Treaties Division, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)), said that the general discussion had been organized at an opportune moment as three framework agreements of crucial importance to future development, in general, and to climate change and disaster risk reduction, in particular, had been concluded in the course of 2015: the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030; the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and the Paris Agreement. Disasters and climate change had devastating effects on human development and over the past two decades had had huge costs for the global economy and the livelihoods of countless people and communities, besides costing many their lives. Women and girls were disproportionately affected as they were particularly vulnerable to the negative impact that droughts, floods and other weather and climate-related events had on food security, agricultural productivity and access to water, sanitation and health care. However, it was now recognized that such effects could be mitigated by women's empowerment and greater gender equality and that incorporating gender perspectives into climate change and disaster risk reduction strategies would be highly beneficial for society, the economy and climate resilience.

3. **Mr. Glasser** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR)) said that the Sendai Framework marked an important paradigm shift away from managing disasters towards managing risk and addressing the underlying causes. Building on the foundations laid in the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, which had been designed to foster disaster resilience among nations and communities, the Sendai Framework recognized the need to accord greater importance to human rights, gender equality and climate change adaptation. For that reason, it called on States to strengthen their legislation and accountability mechanisms and on treaty bodies to support the implementation of the Framework in coordination with other instruments. The application of human rights standards was a means to strengthen disaster risk management and, through the impact of those standards on participation, equality, accountability and other indicators of social well-being, a means to minimize risks. At the same time, preventing and mitigating disasters were in and of themselves a means to protect and promote human rights. The current initiative therefore provided a prominent example of how cross-cutting agendas like human rights, gender equality and disaster risk reduction could be mutually supportive and could be taken forward together.

4. **Mr. Schillinger** (Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Geneva Office) said that climate change affected people differently according to their economic, environmental, cultural and social situation and was essentially an issue of justice. To understand how the notion of justice and injustice applied to climate change, it was necessary to measure the impact of a dramatically changing climate on issues with particular resonance for women, such as the availability of water, the transmission of disease and agricultural productivity, against the

limited extent to which women were able to participate in decisions affecting them and gain access to essential inputs and resources. UNISDR estimated that close to 90 per cent of disasters were caused by weather and climate extremes and, as the impact of climate change created more emergencies and eroded people's ability to cope, the livelihoods and health of men and women would be affected in different ways. For example, because women tended to lead more insular lives and spend more time in the home, they were more likely to lack the crucial information needed to avoid or escape extreme events.

5. That said, women should not be viewed solely as victims. They had valuable skills and knowledge that could contribute to successful adaptation and play a key role in ensuring food and nutritional security. Gender equality and inclusive dialogue were key to the development and implementation of lasting solutions, while understanding and responding to the gender dynamics present in specific contexts were central to building resilience. So far, however, gender-sensitive approaches had been inconsistent and there was a lack of systematic information on the relationship between gender inequality and the impact of disasters. The Committee's general recommendation would help to fill that gap and, besides being used to inform concluding observations as part of the reporting procedure, would serve as an advocacy tool for developing gender-sensitive approaches to disaster risk reduction and climate change and building resilience in communities in general and among women in particular.

Introduction of the general recommendation on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction and climate change

6. **Ms. Haidar**, speaking as Chair of the Working Group on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction and climate change, said that the general recommendation would provide States parties with guidance on the measures that they should adopt in order to fulfil their obligation under the Convention to respect, protect and fulfil women's rights in the context of disaster and climate change. Although the issue of disaster risk reduction had only recently come to the fore, for the past two decades the Committee had observed with increasing frequency that women were disproportionately affected by the impact of disasters. In a number of its concluding observations, it had called on States parties to take steps to address the gender-related dimensions of climate change by adopting targeted country-specific policies, legislation, budgets and other measures and, in 2009, at its forty-fourth session, it had issued a statement calling on all stakeholders to ensure that climate change and disaster risk reduction measures were gender-responsive and that women's right to participate at all levels of decision-making was guaranteed in climate change policies and programmes. Thus, the Committee's decision to draft a general recommendation was the fruit of a long history of observation, discussion and recommendation.

7. As had been noted earlier, situations of crisis exacerbated pre-existing gender inequalities. Such situations also compounded intersecting forms of discrimination that affected certain women, such as women in extreme poverty and women with disabilities, disproportionately. Gender-based violence, lack of access to resources, education, employment and health and limited participation in public and political life were also contributory factors that perpetuated the received idea that women were victims rather than rights holders, and, while women's participation and leadership in development were recognized to be of vital importance in global development frameworks and agreements, it still did not appear that changes had been implemented to make that happen.

8. Empowerment was probably the best way to address women's particular vulnerability to risks and their continued exclusion from strategic decision-making and practical action. To date, however, due to a lack of synergy and coherence between the different frameworks, agreements and measures, progress had been limited. The general recommendation should help to eliminate the gaps in the existing fragmented provisions

and ensure a seamless fusion between the various top-down and bottom-up approaches. Among the key aims of the recommendation was that it should be actionable; that it should provide a compendium of existing best practices; and that it should expand on those practices whenever gaps were identified. In short, it should serve as a manual for gender mainstreaming in disaster risk reduction — a tool that was currently totally lacking.

Keynote speakers

Gender and disaster risk reduction

9. **Ms. Wahlström** (Former Special Representative of the Secretary-General, UNISDR), said that in recent years a major focus of policy development in the area of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation had been the need to increase coherence and reduce fragmentation and thus prevent situations in which implementing countries and organizations felt constrained by conflicting obligations and priorities. The Sendai Framework had gone a long way towards meeting that need, showing that global priorities such as equality, participation and poverty reduction were also local priorities, and that all such priorities were compatible. Development was the overarching global objective, but disaster risk mitigation and climate change adaptation helped to make that objective feasible, besides being goals in themselves. The Sendai Framework and the Hyogo Framework had both clearly established that climate change and disaster risk reduction were development challenges and had to be tackled from that perspective. One of the strengths of the Convention in that respect, and one that gave it particular coherence, was that it accorded equal weight to development and human rights obligations.

10. The adoption of the Sendai Framework had marked the beginning rather than the end of a process. It had clarified the risks to be addressed and the goals to be pursued and established that risks should also be viewed as opportunities. It had also highlighted the importance of demographics in risk management. For example, developed countries with an ageing population and developing countries with a young population required different strategies, while rapid urbanization, though positive in many ways, gave rise to new risks. Above all, the Framework had made clear that, in order to achieve the goals pursued, it was vital for stakeholders to work with the development and climate agendas and consciously seek closer integration and greater coherence between sectors. The need for greater coherence and integration was reflected in the more recently adopted Paris Agreement; the two instruments used similar language and had an overlapping, consistent agenda.

11. The Sendai Framework was a logical and succinct instrument that focused on three key goals: prevention, reduction and resilience. It was essential to prevent further investment in infrastructure that placed communities at risk; to reduce existing risks through more efficient early warning and response systems; and to promote resilience through education, economic empowerment and access to justice so that individuals and communities were in a better position to protect themselves and their assets.

12. The Sendai Framework also established four priorities for action. The first priority was understanding disaster risk. The greatest risks occurred where gaps existed in terms of intersectoral responsibilities, for instance between the environmental and agricultural sectors. The second priority was strengthening of disaster risk governance. It consisted primarily of institutional issues, coordination, policy coherence and political representation at all levels of society. The Hyogo Framework for Action had led to the enactment of disaster-related legislation throughout the world and provision had been made in almost every country for women's involvement in its implementation. However, the institutional dimensions of implementation were still weak. The third priority for action was investment in disaster risk reduction for resilience, namely investment in health, education and the economy. The fourth priority was enhancing preparedness for an effective response to

disasters, and planning for recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction. The Sendai Framework document identified seven global targets and negotiations were currently being conducted on the indicators that should be set.

13. A useful guide to gender mainstreaming in disaster risk reduction had in fact been provided 10 years previously, but, unfortunately, it had not been used. It was important to mobilize women on all issues relating to the Sustainable Development Goals, disaster risk reduction and climate change. Following the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami (also known as the great east Japan earthquake), the Government had undertaken a study of women's role in disaster risk management. The study had found that about 25 per cent of women had participated at the community level but that only about 2 per cent had been involved at the decision-making level. When UNISDR convened meetings, only about one third of the participants were women.

14. When disasters occurred and people were relocated to evacuation centres or displacement camps, women's privacy and safety were still frequently a problem, although the relevant institutions should clearly have made provision for such situations in advance. A change could be brought about if community groups were led by women or if resources were earmarked for the purpose. Of course, there was a great difference between the situation of women in prosperous urban areas and in underdeveloped rural areas throughout the world.

15. The factors measured in a recent report on women's resilience in disasters were economic infrastructure, institutional issues and social factors. Sweden had recently issued statistics indicating that women heads of municipalities earned more money than their male peers. The reason was that they were now better educated and had become more effective negotiators.

Gender responsive strategies on climate change

16. **Ms. Manaenkova** (Assistant Secretary-General, World Meteorological Organization (WMO)) said that the adoption in December 2015 of the Paris Agreement had been a major achievement. The twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+20), which focused on gender equality and the empowerment of women, had also been held in 2015.

17. WMO had convened the Conference on the Gender Dimensions of Weather and Climate Services in November 2014, which had focused on agriculture, water resources management, public health and disaster risk reduction. The Conference had concluded that the effects of weather and climate were not gender-neutral, and that women and men needed gender-sensitive information and services because of their different social roles and vulnerabilities due to existing inequalities. For example, weather and climate warnings were frequently provided via mobile phones, but very few women in developing countries possessed smartphones. In addition, women and children tended to suffer disproportionately from extreme weather events and disasters, especially if they were less mobile. More women than men had died in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami because they were unable to swim and long clothing had hampered their movement. Fourteen times as many women had died during a 1991 cyclone in Bangladesh, partially on account of insufficient access to early warning communication systems. On the other hand, men were more likely to be struck by lightning. It had been discovered in the United States, for example, that men accounted for 81 per cent of mortalities due to lightning strikes. Men also lost their lives more frequently in emergency relief efforts and during post-disaster reconstruction. Climate and disaster risk strategies must therefore consider assessing gender-specific risks and investing in gender-sensitive meteorological and hydrological services.

18. Disaster risk reduction efforts should recognize that women and girls played a central role in the survival and resilience of their families and communities. Women were also skilled in natural resource management and played a key role in climate change adaptation and mitigation. They should therefore participate on an equal footing in decision-making.

19. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that 7 million premature deaths were caused by exposure to air pollution each year. Of that total, 4.3 million were caused by indoor air pollution, which was often generated by stoves, to which women and children were generally more exposed than men. Higher female mortality rates were recorded during heatwaves in certain contexts. However, men were also at risk of heatstroke because they were more likely to be active in hot weather.

20. A gender-responsive climate strategy required closer collaboration between the meteorological, medical and public-health disciplines, more cross-disciplinary research and increased delivery of impact-based forecasts.

21. In many parts of the world, women and girls were usually tasked with collecting and transporting water. As a result of climate change, a great deal more time was spent on such tasks, especially in drought-prone areas. Women and girls were thus not only exposed to the risk of violence but also deprived of time that they could dedicate to education or other productive activities.

22. All policies and programmes relating to climate change and disaster risk reduction should therefore be scanned through a gender lens. Account must be taken of the different needs and roles of women and men in all sectors of the economy and in social systems. Policymakers should also ensure that legislative frameworks were gender-sensitive and that decision-making mechanisms guiding implementation were inclusive. National climate and disaster risk authorities should improve their understanding of gender-specific impacts and should produce and communicate gender-sensitive information in a format and language that citizens could understand. The essential role that women played in sustainable development should also be recognized.

Lessons learned and best practices

23. **Ms. Ikeda** (University of Shizuoka, Japan) said that the Sendai Framework rightly pointed out that women, children and people in vulnerable situations were disproportionately affected by disaster. It also emphasized that disaster risk reduction required empowerment and inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory participation, paying special attention to people disproportionately affected by disasters. A gender, age, disability and cultural perspective should be integrated into all policies and practices, and women and youth leadership should be promoted.

24. The 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan had revealed that disasters affected people differently, depending on factors such as gender, sexuality, age, type and degree of disability, health condition, nationality, language, employment status, family structure, burden of care-giving responsibility and community network. No distinct properties of vulnerability could be attributed to women or other groups. Vulnerability was constructed socially, economically and culturally through the distribution of power, wealth and resources. Macro factors such as demographic changes and urbanization and policies and programmes in socioeconomic sectors could mitigate or aggravate people's vulnerability in certain conditions. It was extremely important to understand the links between gender inequality under normal circumstances and where there was a disaster risk.

25. In some earthquake cases in Japan, especially in urban areas, higher mortality had been observed among older women living alone due to their low income level and their tendency to rent old apartment houses that were less earthquake-resistant.

26. Space in evacuation centres was not arranged to maintain privacy, and relief supplies were not sufficient to enable women, girls, older people, persons with disabilities and other people in vulnerable situations to live with dignity. Lack of emergency response to specific needs aggravated the damage inflicted not only on women but also on family members in their care. Few women occupied decision-making positions among emergency response workers in community-based disaster management organizations and in the Government's emergency management sections. It was therefore difficult to reflect women's needs. Underrepresentation of women in decision-making was a common problem in the area of administration in Japan and in politics, private business and community action.

27. Other serious issues following disasters were disproportionately higher rates and longer periods of unemployment among women, and the high rate of poverty among single mother households. Sexual violence and exploitation, child abuse and domestic violence had also recently been placed on the agenda of disaster risk reduction. New policy measures such as free hotlines had been introduced by the Government after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, but the issue of security during and after the disaster had been neglected during the preparedness stage and by the response and recovery planners and workers.

28. Comprehensive and easily accessible gender-disaggregated data were indispensable for addressing links between gender inequality and disaster risks. Disaster risk reduction and gender equity analysis should be introduced into all policy sectors. Basic information should also be collected on the disaster experiences of people in vulnerable situations. Very little research had been done to date, for example, on the experience of trafficked women and sexual minorities.

29. The successful development of women's leadership in disaster risk reduction required governmental initiatives and effective training programmes. Many trained women were not easily accepted by the conventional community-based disaster management organizations and volunteer disaster response organizations. Women's groups that enhanced disaster risk management capacities rarely collaborated with conventional disaster risk management institutions. The system, institution and concept of disaster management should be changed in order to promote acceptance of gender and diversity perspectives.

30. Institutional arrangement of disaster risk management should also be reviewed. Community disaster management organizations in Japan were conventionally established under residents' or neighbourhood associations. Retired but active men in their sixties and seventies were the principal members. Women of the same generation also participated, but they were seldom engaged in decision-making. Younger generations with more egalitarian gender attitudes were generally not very interested in disaster management activities.

31. It was necessary to build the resilience of institutions through collaboration with civil society organizations working in areas such as welfare, education, human rights and poverty eradication. The Government should foster partnerships between the disaster risk management sector and the gender equity sector across the administration and civil society. Women's leadership potential for disaster risk reduction could also be strengthened by building the capacity of professional women in the economic, legal, welfare, medical, educational, technological and political sectors.

32. Disaster risk management should cover all disaster phases, from preparedness to response, recovery and mitigation. More attention should be paid to reducing underlying risk factors in society by taking disaster risk reduction into account in policies aimed at poverty reduction, welfare, employment, establishment of social safety nets and community development.

Regional perspectives on disaster risk reduction and climate change

33. **Mr. Mondal** (CARE Bangladesh) said that Bangladesh was particularly vulnerable to the impact of climate change and that at-risk communities tried to use their scarce resources to minimize losses. In 1991, the country had been struck by a cyclone that had claimed the lives of 140,000 people, of whom around 90 per cent had been women or girls. Globally, women were estimated to account for 80 per cent of refugees and displaced persons, and suffered the double injustice of being more exposed to natural disasters and less equipped to respond to them.

34. Bangladeshi women tended to be more vulnerable because: they were excluded from planning and decision-making; they were reliant on natural resources for their livelihoods; they were not recognized as farmers and were therefore deprived of agricultural subsidies; early warning systems were targeted at men; and the migration of men left them overburdened and in a state of insecurity. Women were also disproportionately affected by erratic rainfall and were more susceptible to domestic and sexual violence, especially in the wake of natural disasters.

35. To reduce the vulnerability of women, the Government of Bangladesh had undertaken to adopt a gender-based approach to disaster resilience in all its plans, policies and programmes, including the National Plan for Disaster Management for the period 2010-2015. There was, however, a significant gap between policy and practice.

36. Women could make an invaluable contribution to disaster preparedness activities, not least because their traditional role as providers of food and water made them keenly aware of their environment. CARE Bangladesh had sought to harness that potential by training women volunteers to provide guidance on disaster preparedness, but the project had been limited in scope and needed to be expanded. It had also endeavoured to ensure that women were recognized as farmers and that they participated actively in family decision-making. The Government, meanwhile, had begun sending mobile flood alerts to persons living on the banks of the Jamuna River so as to enable them to protect their movable assets.

37. To encourage women's involvement in climate change mitigation and adaptation, Governments should: acknowledge women's vulnerable status and their potential; guarantee their access to appropriate resources; strengthen the dialogue with local communities; intensify efforts to promote gender equality; ensure women's access to information on disaster reduction; and respond to women's needs and concerns. Moreover, it was important to consult men and women separately in the development of plans and to persuade men to engage in household chores.

38. **Ms. Kambon** (Public policy expert) said that, in the small island developing States of the Caribbean, climate change was manifested by floods, tropical storms, hurricanes and droughts. The biggest threat, however, was posed by rising sea levels. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, levels could rise by up to 60 cm by 2100, which would lead to flooding in low-lying areas and increase the risk of saltwater intrusion. The consequences of natural disasters and climate change for women and girls could be broken down into at least six key areas.

39. First, the labour-market sectors worst affected by disasters tended to be those in which women were most represented, such as agriculture and tourism. Women were usually the first to lose their livelihoods and were less able to regain them as the skills valued in a period of recovery were those acquired in trades that women were seldom encouraged to pursue. Few women possessed land titles and many worked at home, which reduced their chances of obtaining funding after a disaster. They were also overlooked in the organization of training in climate-smart agricultural techniques and, more significantly,

were not able to move freely to seek income-generating opportunities owing to their duties as carers.

40. Second, in the decision-making processes following disasters, women were denied an equal voice. They lacked the time and mobility to participate in post-disaster meetings, which were rarely held in rural areas and were often organized by interministerial committees. Such committees consolidated power at the top and reduced the influence of local authority bodies, in which women tended to be more involved. Moreover, women's NGOs usually played minor roles in recovery and reconstruction, and were seen only as humanitarian relief actors.

41. Third, there was growing concern that disasters exacerbated existing income and social inequality, which had been inherited by Caribbean States as a result of colonialism and slavery. Although some social protection measures had been taken to redress imbalances, changes in the global economic environment, the shrinking value of exportable commodities and the frequency of disasters had left many small States deeply divided between those with access to resources and those without. In the wake of disasters, emphasis was rightly placed on the reconstruction of infrastructure, but it was too often done to the detriment of recovery measures that addressed long-term social development needs.

42. Fourth, internal or external migration in response to disasters could have negative consequences for women and girls. If male breadwinners were forced to migrate, their spouses and children could be left dependent on remittances, while the external migration of women and girls placed them at greater risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking. Internal migration also brought challenges, as it was usually to the poorest urban settings and stripped women of the social capital on which they relied for support.

43. Fifth, inadequate data on the social impact of disasters acted as a constraint on informed policy-making. Statistics collected after disasters tended not to be disaggregated by sex, which resulted in gender-blind policies for medium- and long-term recovery. Moreover, a lack of data on informal economic activities left many women with little or no access to the resources distributed during the recovery phase.

44. Sixth, women's perspectives were not heard in discussions on funding for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, debt restructuring and forgiveness, and alternative funding mechanisms, despite the fact that poor women, in particular, were disproportionately affected by the indebtedness of small Caribbean States. More had to be done to engage women in discussions and to highlight and respond to their concerns.

45. In the Caribbean, women had been key actors at the community level and possessed a demonstrated capacity for the transfer of informal knowledge. They should therefore participate more actively in the processes of disaster risk reduction and of climate change adaptation, not just as the beneficiaries of programmes but also as the persons responsible for shaping and delivering them.

Oral statements by States parties

46. **Mr. Nagaoka** (Japan) said that, on 11 March 2016, Japan would commemorate the fifth anniversary of the great east Japan earthquake, which had caused unprecedented damage and had left over 18,000 people dead or missing. Women had played an important role in both the emergency response and recovery phases. In some cases, however, women evacuees had encountered challenges in the shelters because their concerns and perspectives had not been duly taken into account.

47. In the Sendai Framework, emphasis was placed on promoting women's participation in managing disaster risk and on the need for measures to empower women to deal with

post-disaster situations. In a document based on discussions held at the 2015 World Assembly for Women, Japan had proposed that, in order to promote women's leadership in disaster risk reduction, the whole disaster cycle should be considered from the viewpoint of both men and women, who should be given opportunities to share ideas and to participate in decision-making.

48. **Mr. Méndez** (Argentina) said that, in the Committee's general recommendation on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction and climate change, it should be mentioned that disasters increased women's vulnerability, in particular to domestic and sexual violence; that, in post-disaster situations, gender issues were ignored or dismissed as irrelevant; that disaster situations provided a unique opportunity to change traditional gender roles; that women's specific concerns and needs should be taken into account throughout the disaster cycle; that States should undertake to reduce gender inequality; that, during the reconstruction process, some projects should be geared specifically towards vulnerable groups; and that a gender perspective should be incorporated in disaster impact assessments, in the development of risk maps and in emergency response plans.

49. States should also be encouraged to adopt a gender-sensitive approach to climate change programmes, to empower women with regard to decision-making and to the implementation of climate change policies, and to foster women's participation in climate change negotiations.

50. **Ms. Lecaros Terry** (Peru) said that women presented both a challenge — because they were particularly vulnerable to natural disasters and in need of special protection measures — and an opportunity, because of their knowledge of techniques and traditions and their role as defenders of children and land. The Government of Peru was convinced of the importance of adopting a human rights-based approach to sustainable public policies and, with that in mind, was drafting a gender and climate change action plan to contribute to the advancement of gender equality.

51. One of the successes of the 2014 United Nations Climate Change Conference had been the adoption of the Lima Work Programme on Gender, which aimed to encourage the implementation of gender-responsive climate policies. Climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies should take into account gender equality and the needs of vulnerable groups and efforts should be made to promote the participation of local communities and of indigenous peoples.

52. **Mr. Dalcero** (Brazil) said that the search for new patterns of sustainable development should reconcile economic growth with social inclusion, especially of women, and should highlight their role in defending food security. It was vital to guarantee the participation of women in development discussions and take into account their diverse needs, to empower women and girls in order to build resilient communities, to take a gender-sensitive approach to national policies on disaster risk reduction and to reinforce prevention measures by rolling out capacity-building initiatives for women. Recognizing that disasters had a disproportionate impact on women, despite their central role in protecting children, older persons and other vulnerable groups in emergencies, her Government had actively advocated for the inclusion of gender vulnerabilities and gender identity in the Sendai Framework. Gender-sensitive indicators should be developed in order to monitor the implementation of the Framework, which implied the collection of gender-disaggregated data.

53. **Mr. Moscoso** (Chile) said that insufficient attention was paid to the vulnerability of women and girls to sexual violence when natural disasters occurred. In 2015, in response to unprecedented rainfall in usually arid parts of Chile, the National Service for Women had taken measures in a number of areas, including crisis management, psychosocial care and the prevention of violence against women, and had distributed guidelines to shelters on the

different needs of male and female victims of disasters. The Government's efforts were not centred on emergency situations alone: it actively promoted the inclusion of a gender perspective in international climate change talks. For example, it had championed greater balance in the delegations and organizations involved in the negotiation of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, had supported the decision on the Lima Work Programme on Gender that had been adopted at the twentieth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention and had actively promoted the inclusion of human rights and gender in the Paris Agreement.

54. **Mr. Ramet** (France), recalling that the Paris Agreement was the first universal environmental agreement to mention human rights, gender equality, intergenerational equality and decent employment explicitly, said that it was now time to capitalize on the momentum gained and adopt local and national climate change strategies that promoted gender equality and recognized the disproportionate impact that such change had on women. Moreover, women, as key elements of the solution, should be placed at the heart of all relevant strategies, including in matters of access to finance and new technologies. In that connection, France, in partnership with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), would be hosting a side event on the role of women in the fight against climate change during the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

55. **Mr. Valencia Muñoz** (Colombia) said that climate change and disaster risk reduction posed complex challenges in terms of compliance with international obligations, such as those under the Convention. It was therefore necessary to develop practical and flexible tools to address each country's unique situation and to anchor those tools in a robust information system based on high-quality data. Women were not merely victims of climate change and disasters, they were also powerful agents for change and, as such, should participate fully in relevant decision-making.

56. **Ms. Bibalou Bounda** (Gabon) said that there was evidence that women were at greater risk of gender-based violence, had less access to humanitarian aid and tended to lose their livelihoods following natural disasters. Discrimination against women in environmental planning and management was unjustifiable considering the leading role that they played in resource management and assistance to victims of natural disasters. In Gabon, which had declared the period 2015-2025 as the Decade of Gabonese Women, climate change was a major source of concern for rural women. Accordingly, a rural women and climate change capacity-building programme was being implemented with the support of the Government of Norway. Gabon looked forward to further achievements in involving women in climate change efforts at the next Conference of the Parties in Morocco.

Oral statements by non-governmental organizations

57. **Mr. Knalfan** (Amnesty International) said that he wished to thank the Committee for the concept note that it had provided in order to focus the discussion and suggested that the general recommendation should elaborate on State obligations under articles 2 and 3 of the Convention. For example, it should address gender identity, sexual and reproductive health during and after disasters and the importance of not creating additional administrative barriers to relief aid for women and girls. Discussions about disaster risk reduction and response should be seen as an opportunity to remedy unequal enjoyment of rights and avoid becoming entrenched in familiar patterns of gender discrimination.

58. **Ms. McKernan** (Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Democracy, Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Landesa Center For Women's Land Rights) said that a critical missing piece in climate change strategies was the importance of women's land rights, especially in rural areas. Securing women's land rights could enhance

resilience to climate change and strengthen the ability of communities to respond to shifting circumstances. Evidence suggested that when women held secure rights to land, efforts to tackle climate change were more successful and responsibilities and benefits associated with climate change response programmes were more equitably distributed. Conversely, without effective legal control over the land they farmed or the proceeds of their labour, women often lacked the incentive, security, opportunity or authority to make decisions about how to conserve the land and ensure its long-term productivity. Accordingly, she recommended that States should address the multiple threats posed to women's land rights by climate change, ensure that climate change strategies did not undermine women's land rights, recognize the positive impact of securing women's land rights, incorporate such rights into climate change mitigation and adaptation policies and promote women's participation and decision-making at all stages of climate change-related strategies and interventions.

59. **Mr. Gray** (Human Rights Watch) said that he welcomed the broad definition of disaster put forward by the Committee and hoped that the field research his organization had submitted would be useful in subsequent drafting of the general recommendation on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction and climate change. One issue that underpinned all the others was the right of women and girls to participate in the processes to address climate change and disasters. They played an important role in natural resource management and other productive activities at the household and community levels and their extensive knowledge made them effective actors of climate change mitigation and disaster risk reduction and adaptation strategies. While governments around the world were becoming more proactive in developing such strategies and in preparing and refining disaster risk reduction plans, women and girls were often excluded from the process. The Committee should make the full participation of women and girls in all local, national and international processes in that domain a major priority. It should also ask all States parties that came before it whether women took part in planning for climate change and disasters and whether the fact that those phenomena had a different impact on men and women was integrated into planning processes. The failure to involve women in peacebuilding efforts in the past must not be repeated with regard to climate change and disasters.

60. **Ms. Chand** (International Disability Alliance) said that Fiji had recently been hit by the most powerful tropical storm in the history of the southern hemisphere and that, while the full extent of the damage was unknown, harrowing stories were already emerging of persons with disabilities being left to die, being unable to travel to shelters and having lost their assistive devices. Drawing the Committee's attention to article 11 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, she said that the Committee should include women and girls with disabilities in the general recommendation. A high standard of protection and resilience were possible only through the adoption of an inclusive and participatory approach to policymaking; the enforcement of accessibility standards with regard to information, communications and the environment; and the adoption of a rights-based approach to ensure equal access to various services, food and social security in both rural and urban settings.

61. **Mr. Smith** (Sightsavers) said that the findings of research conducted by Sightsavers in Bangladesh had proved the need to make the rights of women and girls with disabilities a priority because prevailing attitudes and customs made them more vulnerable than men and restricted their movement in disaster situations and because the lack of separate shelters increased their risk of becoming victims of sexual violence. Thus it was important to involve persons with disabilities in decision-making at the local, national and international levels. He urged the Committee to prioritize the rights of women and girls with disabilities in the general recommendation and address the need to strengthen information systems and data collection, to take into account gender and disability in risk assessments and to enhance the leadership capability and resources of persons with disabilities and their

representative organizations with a view to engaging them in efforts to tackle development challenges.

Closing remarks

62. **Ms. Haidar**, thanking the participants for their valuable input, said that the main salient points were the need for greater coherence among all the various instruments dealing with climate change and disaster risk reduction, the considerable gap between policy and practice, the need for capacity-building and inclusive processes and the inadequacy of data. Other issues that had retained the Committee's attention included the need to understand risk factors, the difference between reconstruction and recovery and the importance of including a gender perspective in all phases of disaster management, from preparedness to response.

63. **The Chair**, thanking all the participants for their contribution to an informative and constructive discussion, said that it would serve as a strong foundation for the general recommendation.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.